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30 January 2018

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of 18 January 2018, with its attached E-Mail from your correspondent, Mr Julian Paren of Marowan, Munloch, IV8 8PF, concerning the withdrawal by Serco Caledonian Sleeper Ltd (SCSL) of the option for single travellers to share a twin-berth compartment with a stranger on the Caledonian Sleeper.

The Caledonian Sleeper service is undergoing transformational change. New classes of accommodation will be offered as new trains come into service, and the company will move to a hotel-style booking service, allowing passengers to book rooms rather than individual berths. Indeed, for many passengers choosing to travel together the fare for a two-berth rooms will be cheaper than current arrangements.

As Mr Paren has identified, the current Standard Class passenger offer, which requires that passengers may share a berth with a stranger of the same sex when demand for travel is high, will be removed. All rooms will be offered as solo-occupancy, unless passengers book to travel together.

I do understand the concerns of those who have been used to booking the share with a stranger option and who would be happy to continue on that basis.

However, consultation by the Scottish Government before re-franchising, and passenger research conducted by Serco Caledonian both pre- and post-franchise commencement, has indicated that the share with a stranger option was seen as outmoded, and contrary to the expectations of today's rail travellers. Any requirement that the existing, sharing arrangement remain as the default for standard class travel was seen as unattractive to passengers, and may dissuade single passengers from using sleeper services.



Security of passengers was also raised in market research and is a key concern for both the Scottish Government and Serco Caledonian Sleepers Limited. Following specification of the franchise, and Caledonian Sleepers' response, additional security measures have been introduced to new trains. Hotel-style key cards will operate berth locks, individual lockers will be provided for seated passengers, and CCTV will cover all communal areas.

For passengers wishing to travel without paying the full cost of a berth, improved seated accommodation will be offered on new trains. New reclining seats will be available, with individual lighting, power sockets for mobiles and laptops, individual overhead lockers and an at-seat refreshment service.

It is unfortunate that new trains delivery is delayed. As plans stand, the new fleet will be introduced in two tranches, to the Lowland service in October and to the Highland routes thereafter.

As you may be aware Caledonian Sleeper now operates a twelve-month booking window, allowing passengers to plan ahead and secure advance travel fares. Now that the company has confirmed the date of the first deployment of new trains, but not the second, it is offering advanced booking on the basis of the new accommodation mix. The intention is to bring the second tranche into service as closely as possible after the first but that date is not finalised. It is for this reason that the share with a stranger option is being withdrawn from the current fleet; until dates are confirmed the company does not wish to inadvertently book passengers into new trains on the basis of the share with a stranger arrangement, when other passengers will have booked expecting solo occupancy.

Mr Paren asks about arrangements on Serco ferries. Serco will have taken its decision to continue to allow single travellers to purchase berths in shared cabins on NorthLink ferries based on its own research of ferry passengers.

Thank you for noting the improvements we are planning to bring to Caledonian Sleeper services. I hope that as many people as possible, including Mr Paren, will try out the new trains and ensure the long-term future of the Caledonian Sleeper.

Best Wishes,
H. You
HUMZA YOUSAF